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Report of the twenty-seventh series of Joint Meetings of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Administrative Committee on Coordination held on 27 October 1993

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) held the twenty-seventh series of Joint Meetings at United Nations Headquarters on 27 October 1993 under the chairmanship of Mr. T. P. Sreenivasan (India), Chairman of CPC.

2. The provisional agenda for the Joint Meetings (E/1993/120) was adopted; it contained the following item: Results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and their implications for the United Nations system.

3. The Joint Meetings had before them a background paper, prepared by the ACC secretariat, which drew the attention of the Joint Meetings to a number of issues recently addressed by ACC and its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and by the Commission on Sustainable Development, which were of particular relevance to CPC as the main subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the area of programme planning and coordination. These included matters related to coordination at the field level as well as at the international level; coordination among intergovernmental bodies; matters related to financing; and programme questions.

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

4. The Joint Meetings decided that the results of the Meetings should be presented in the form of a Chairman's summary of the discussion as well as conclusions which would reflect the Chairman's understanding of the broad convergence of views among participants. The Chairman's summary is reproduced below.

Discussion

5. The meeting welcomed the opening statement by the Chairman and the introductory remarks made by Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, in which he elaborated on the three principal issues identified in the background paper (E/1993/121) for discussion. He emphasized that the cooperative spirit in which the United Nations system had contributed so effectively to the preparations for the Rio Summit continued to prevail in its follow-up. It had in fact been institutionalized by ACC in setting up the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and in allocating responsibilities for the implementation of Agenda 21 among the organizations of the system by designating task managers with clearly defined functions and responsibilities. Each organization was undertaking a thorough analysis of the implications of Agenda 21 for its work programme, and was reassessing and reordering priorities accordingly. The results were being reported to the respective intergovernmental bodies and to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The organizations of the system were concerned about the issues of additional financing for the implementation of new mandates arising from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and

the increased reporting requirements emanating from the Commission on Sustainable Development.

6. The executive heads of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme and the representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Maritime Organization and the World Food Programme briefed the meeting on the actions being taken by their organizations in response to Agenda 21, including the arrangements and mechanisms for coordination and cooperation with other organizations of the system with a view to carrying out these tasks in a cost-effective and efficient manner. The role of ACC and its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, as well as that of the task managers for the various chapters and programme areas of Agenda 21 in ensuring a well-coordinated United Nations system response was emphasized. It was also noted that better coordination at the country level was the key to success. In this respect, the role of Governments was critical. The task before the United Nations system was to assist Governments in enhancing their capacity to coordinate international assistance, formulate national sustainable development strategies and plans and implement them. The mobilization of resources and application of environmentally sound technologies were essential in these tasks.

7. In identifying the problems of coordination, a number of representatives of organizations emphasized the constraints imposed by policies of zero-growth budgeting, the stagnation in extrabudgetary resources and the need for policy consistency among intergovernmental bodies.

8. Members of CPC expressed satisfaction at the steps taken by ACC, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, and its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, to establish the necessary mechanisms for an effective and well-coordinated United Nations system follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. They also noted with appreciation the information and analysis provided in the background document for the meeting. They recognized the need for consistency of policies adopted by Governments, both at the national level and in various intergovernmental bodies. A number of delegations, while recognizing the need for additional resources, emphasized the need for a systematic and clear setting of priorities in the light of Agenda 21, streamlining existing programmes and adapting structures accordingly with a view to avoiding overlapping and duplication and releasing resources for the more effective implementation of the Conference recommendations by the organizations of the United Nations system.

9. A number of members of CPC stressed the central role of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Economic and Social Council in the coordination of the United Nations system activities relating to the follow-up to the Conference. In general terms, some members advocated avoiding overlapping between the themes of meetings of CPC/ACC and the coordination segment of the Council. They underscored the need for integration between the environmental

and developmental dimensions of Agenda 21 and felt that equal attention should be paid to both. Some members emphasized that environmental and developmental aspects in fact constitute one integrated dimension of Agenda 21. Environmental objectives should not be pursued at the expense of development. They considered that the goals of the Conference could not be achieved without the mobilization of new and additional resources. While the United Nations system must reorder its priorities and programmes, it clearly needed additional funding if it was to fulfil the new demands placed on it. The United Nations system must assist developing countries in a coherent manner to enable them to achieve these objectives. Some members stressed that, in the execution of projects, no "environment conditionality" should be introduced.

10. Following initial presentations, a free and open exchange of views took place during which members of CPC and a representative of the Commission on Sustainable Development raised questions and sought clarifications or additional information and the representatives of organizations responded to their queries.

Conclusions

11. The effective implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development present a major challenge to programmes, organs and organizations of the United Nations system. The multi-disciplinary nature of the Conference follow-up requires an integrated approach to coordination at both the policy-making and the programme implementation levels.

12. The innovative nature of the coordination process launched within the United Nations system, which is based on the decentralized allocation of responsibilities to the task managers, taking into account experience and competitive advantage, with a central coordination function being vested in the mandate of the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, provides an important framework for achieving a coherent system-wide response to the Conference follow-up requirements.

13. The effectiveness of such a response would largely depend on reorienting and streamlining as well as on strengthening programmes in line with Agenda 21, identifying priorities and strengthening collaborative arrangements for coordination and joint programming. The meeting welcomed actions recently taken in that direction by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and individual organizations.

14. The multi-year thematic programme of work adopted by the Commission on Sustainable Development provides a focus and time-frame for the coordination of system-wide activities to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, at both intergovernmental and inter-agency levels.

15. It is crucial to ensure harmonization of policy guidance on sustainable development issues given by various governing bodies throughout the United Nations system. The Commission on Sustainable Development could play a key role in assisting the Economic and Social Council in discharging its mandate in the area of system-wide coordination.

16. Coordination of policy approaches should start at the national level. Setting up national coordinating structures to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which was recommended in Agenda 21, would be helpful to achieve that goal.

17. The United Nations system, in particular through its resident coordinator network, could play a key role in coordination of international support for national activities to follow up the Conference. In addition to specific projects, adequate support would need to be given to the elaboration of national sustainable development strategies, recommended at Rio. It would be essential for this process to take into account ongoing activities related to national environment action plans and country strategies to achieve complementarity and coherence of efforts.

18. It would be important to achieve effective interaction of relevant organizations in preparation of their contributions to the reports of the Secretary-General requested by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Decisions of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development on reporting provide a framework for such reporting arrangements. At the same time, it would be important to ensure that reporting requirements are met not at the expense of programme delivery.

19. With regard to the need for additional funding to meet the new mandates stemming from decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and to carry out programmes envisaged in Agenda 21, the importance of forthcoming discussions in ACC and the information to be provided to the Commission on Sustainable Development by organizations of the United Nations system on their financial needs and priorities to implement Agenda 21 has been highlighted.

20. Another crucial area is coordination of United Nations activities in the area of transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building. In particular, it is essential to ensure effective interaction and collaborative arrangements in this area within the framework of the Economic and Social Council on the basis of clear division of labour and responsibilities. The forthcoming discussions at the coordination segment of the Council in 1994 would provide an important opportunity to address this matter. The meeting recommended that the Council consider "science and technology" as one of the themes for the coordination segment of its substantive session of 1994.

21. The need for broader participation of all interested agencies in such important mechanisms as the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme's Capacity 21 was underscored.

22. There is a need for further development of partnerships between organizations of the United Nations system and the representatives of non-governmental organizations, as well as the private sector.